

Happy Advent.

We begin A new Church year by waiting. The Advent message is to wait and be prepared for the coming of God's reign.

Waiting sounds so passive, especially for us modern Americans.

Ever board a plane, stow your luggage, and fasten your seatbelts, Only to be told there is a "slight problem" that will delay us 10 minutes; which turns into 30 minutes; then an hour. We become impatient along with the rest of the passengers. Hey, they promised us an on-time departure. Now we are waiting and waiting, hoping we will make our connection; hoping the person who will pick us up will not give up on us.

Waiting

Recently I was making the rounds visiting the dying and their families. I asked a nurse and a social worker if a certain family would like a visit. They responded, no the family is Muslim. The dying person would become very anxious at the appearance of a minister, whether Muslim or not. They added the family is very sad and distressed, extremely tired of waiting. (I thought to myself, boy this would certainly be a challenging visit.) The family's distress was tugging at my heart.

I suggested that the social worker whisper in the ear of the family decision maker that a chaplain is in the building, would you like to visit with him? I was surprised that the answer was yes, would I meet with the family member in the chapel. I sat and listened to the daughter of this Muslim patient speak of the long process of dying. The waiting.

Inward reflection: (Its when we or someone we love is suffering and the pain tries our patience, we feel like we are about to go into a downward spiral of doubt. We pray.... hope grows thin....hearts grow heavy.

The waiting and frustration tempt us to say something like, God doesn't care, or I am not worthy,we might also conclude that God doesn't keep promises.)

Due to the desire of this daughter to have Mom die and be free of suffering, the daughter was feeling much guilt wishing her mom would die. Guilt driven by her own exhaustion, loss of patience waiting for the promise of death and peace. I validated her emotions and concerns.

The daughter shared she often sits here in the chapel alone and prays. She added she goes to church and prays. I asked her where she worships and she responded, the Catholic Church. I thought, how interesting.

A muslim woman praying in a Catholic Church. A muslim finding peace, crossing the boundaries of organized religion to pray while she waits. We prayed together. This was a peace filled visit. Tears rolled down her cheeks as we prayed for peace and patience.

Suitcase...Pull old alb out of suitcase

I have in my hands my recently retired Alb. When this alb was new it needed to be taken up a few inches and hemmed. I went to a local tailor shop. The woman behind the counter asked what the garment is used for. I told her I am Catholic clergy. She responded, That is wonderful. I asked her if she was Catholic, she responded, " No, I am Muslim." We chatted for a bit and she offered to have the alteration right away.. No need to wait.

When finished, she greeted me with a beautiful smile. The alb was altered perfectly. I had a sense that she prayed while altering it for me.

I guess I shared these things with you in light of what is happening in our world today. Its difficult for us to maintain faith over the long haul what with all of the evil distractions. Random acts of radical terrorism. Innocents slaughtered. I thought it a wonderful opportunity to speak on intimate relationships of love that cross difficult boundaries.

Jesus has taught us to love God and love one another. Not to be driven by fear, but to be driven by love.

With all the richness of the Advent season and the scriptural readings, I asked myself, what would I preach this Sunday? Should I focus on God's faithfulness and promises to those in exile. Should I try to help people identify

their own experience of exile: Sin? Fear? Alienation? Depression? Failure? Sickness? Waiting for a loved one to die?

Should I try to encourage trust in what God has promised through the prophet: God will come out to their place of exile, be with them and lead them home.

The gospel speaks of times that can shatter even our most stable and secure lives. Did God enter into the exile of the daughter of the Muslim dying Muslim woman? I am sure he did.

During this Advent season, may God come to you in your own exile, whatever it might be. May God richly bless you.